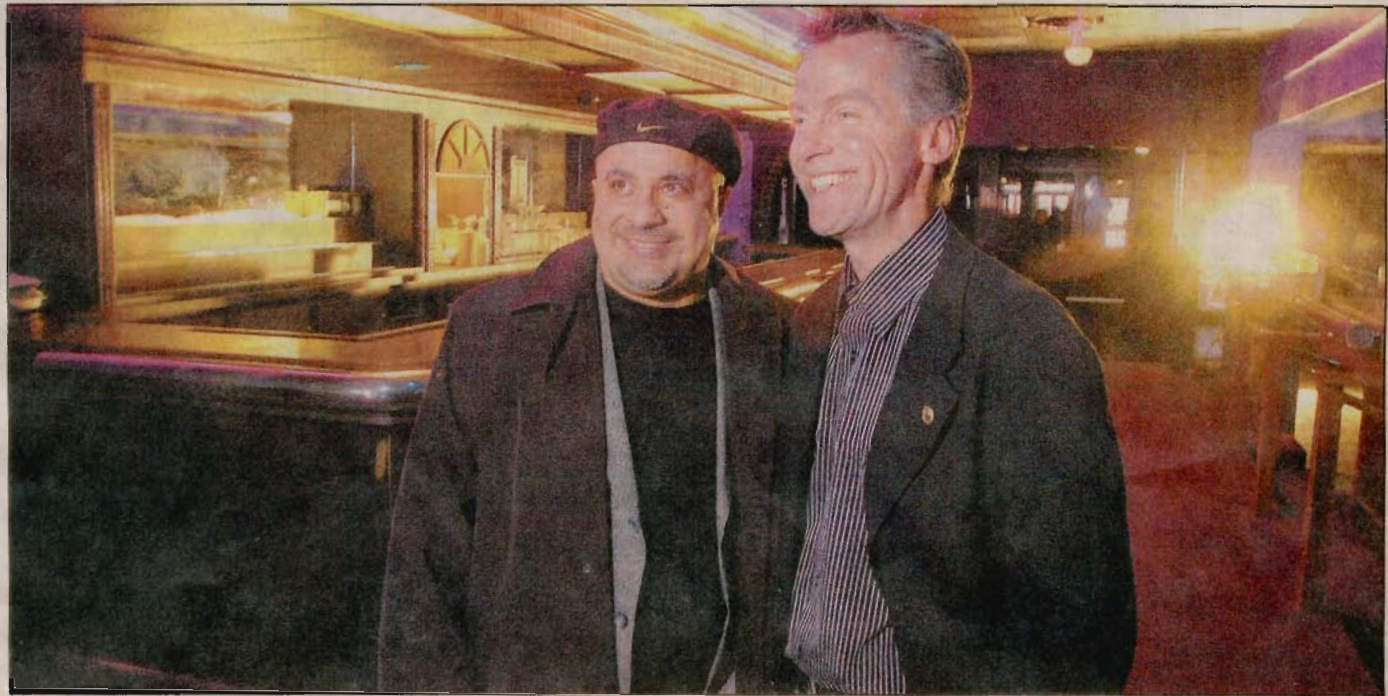


BUSINESS



MORRIS LAMONT Sun Media

HELPING YOUTH: Developer Shmuel Farhi, left, and Steve Cordes, executive director of Youth Opportunities Unlimited, have a look around 332-338 Richmond St. following a morning reception yesterday. Farhi gave YOU \$1 million to buy his building and convert it into a centre serving troubled youth.

YOU welcomes new digs

BY HANK DANISZEWSKI
Sun Media

London developer Shmuel Farhi delivered one big Hanukkah gift yesterday, lighting the way for London's youth for many years to come.

Farhi, who owns more than 50 buildings in the core, presented a cheque for more than \$1 million to Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) to help the agency buy from him the former hotel at York and Richmond streets for a new youth centre.

The building has sentimental value for Farhi. He started his real estate empire by buying the building in 1986, shortly after emigrating from Israel. With his donation to YOU, it will be the first building he's ever sold.

"It's a small gift to open some doors and save souls," said Farhi.

Farhi said the centre will get troubled youth off the street into a supervised setting where they can learn job skills.

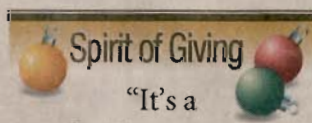
"We can give them a place to live, a place where they have an opportunity to integrate into the workplace," said Farhi.

YOU executive director Steve Cordes said the building will house a number of facilities.

► The upper floors will house 28 affordable housing units including bachelor, one- and two-bedroom apartments for youth in need. The project will receive \$1.6 million from the city's affordable housing fund.

► A ground floor cafe will provide work experience for YOU members

► An industrial kitchen will provide job training and production facilities for jams and preserves sold by YOU



"It's a small gift to open some doors and save souls."

Shmuel Farhi

enterprises.

► A Youth Action Centre will provide support services. The area will include showers, a stage area and an Internet cafe

The agency is applying for \$500,000 in grants to renovate the building that will serve 100 to 150 young persons on a daily basis.

Amber Garrow moved to London from St. Mary's a few years ago and went through some rough times before joining YOU.

"They totally helped me out. They gave me a chance and they don't give up," said

Garrow who now is involved in sales development for a YOU program.

Dustin, who declined to give his last name, can't wait to get into one of the affordable apartments. He has to get up at 5 a.m. every day to catch a bus to get to his job in downtown London.

Cordes said the building, which opened in 1879 as the Grigg Hotel, will need extensive renovation and likely will not open until next summer. However, he said it will be a positive step to solving some of downtown's social problems.

"These kids are already in our community now and we can't afford to lose them. With Canada's economy growing, we want to get them into the labour market," said Cordes.

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